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TAGS: PREL FR CG CF NG XA

SUBJECT: DRC/ROC/NIGER: FRENCH PRESIDENCY'S READOUT OF  
SARKOZY'S MARCH 26-27 VISITS

REF: A. PARIS 399

1B. KINSHASA 291

1C. BRAZZAVILLE 101

1D. NIAMEY 234

1E. 08 PARIS 1501

1F. 08 PARIS 1568

1G. 08 PARIS 1698

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Sarkozy's March 26-27 visits to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo (ROC), and Niger were intended to promote democratic principles, shared business interests, and, more generally, Sarkozy's policy of moving away from the "France-Afrique" model of managing relations to a more modern one based on partnership, according to Presidential Deputy Diplomatic Advisor Bruno Joubert on April 3. Joubert said that Sarkozy had accomplished what he had set out to do and that the Africans with whom he met better understood French policy toward the region and where Sarkozy wants to take relations, even if they were not completely comfortable with the new paradigm. On the DRC and Rwanda, Joubert explained that France wanted to promote cooperation between the two and suggested starting with a number of small economic and development projects that would show quick results and encourage further cooperation. Joubert said that he planned to travel to the U.S. during the April 14-15 period and hoped to meet with officials at the Department (AF A/S-Designate Carson), NSC (AF Senior Director Gavin), and USUN (PermRep Rice). END SUMMARY.

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France-Afrique

14. (C) Rather than provide a narrative of Sarkozy's visit, Joubert placed it within the context of France's evolving Africa policy and its movement, under Sarkozy, away from the classic colonial and post-colonial "France-Afrique" model and towards a more modern relationship based on shared interests and a partnership among equals (ref E-G). He said that the visit, most notably as expressed in Sarkozy's speech before the DRC parliament, was an extension of remarks that Sarkozy had made in Cape Town in February 2008 on the need for rational relationships free of the baggage of the past. Joubert said that the new policy faced several challenges, one of which he described as a predilection on the part of the French public and press to view relations with Africa as inherently "corrupt, sordid, and scandal-ridden." The public and press often looked at Africa only from this angle. One of Sarkozy's aims was to carry out a visit crisply,

efficiently, and transparently. He wanted to show that France could deal with its African partners as straightforwardly as it dealt with its other partners, and Joubert deemed this aspect of the visit a success, even if its briskness and openness left the press, critics, and some Africans a bit perplexed.

15. (C) Always seeking to put a negative light on relations, some observers, while claiming to condemn "France-Afrique," at the same time accused Sarkozy of trying to "rupture" French relations with Africa. Joubert said that neither Sarkozy nor anyone else speaking officially for France had ever used the term "rupture." The move away from "France-Afrique" was instead a "turning of a page" and a shift in direction towards a more modern and balanced relationship.

16. (C) Thus partnership was an underlying theme of the

PARIS 00000504 002 OF 002

visit. In Niger, for example, where French extractive-industry giant AREVA and its activities were a central element of the visit, Sarkozy stressed not only the mutual benefits derived from AREVA's uranium operations but also the other positive aspects of AREVA's presence in terms of improved roads and infrastructure for the common good. The same was true for AREVA's activities in the DRC.

17. (C) Another theme was democracy and good governance, with Joubert noting that France was unfairly accused of only supporting "old regimes." Sarkozy's speeches in the DRC and ROC stressed the need for both countries to adhere to democratic principles and that these principles were not something applicable only in the West. Joubert said that Sarkozy's stop in Brazzaville had to be managed "delicately." As also noted ref C, Sarkozy did not want to appear to be campaigning for President Sassou Nguesso regarding elections later in 2009, and Joubert pointed out that Sarkozy met with opposition figures to underscore that point.

18. (C) Asked how the press and Africans viewed the visit, Joubert said that the press response was muted, in part because the visit did not take place according to press preconceptions. Joubert indicated that this was a positive development insofar as the press was forced to think about the visit. Joubert said that African leaders seemed to understand what Sarkozy's approach represented in terms of transparent, straightforward dealings, although they may not have been completely comfortable with it. Speaking quite candidly, Joubert said that "you have to understand, many of these leaders, such as Sassou Nguesso, have grown up with 'France-Afrique.' When they used to meet with Chirac, it was all backslapping, jokes, long leisurely meals, and plenty of anecdotes about the old days, when they and Chirac were younger and coming up together. Sarkozy isn't like that at all; it takes some getting used to for some of them. There were a few comments about why Sarkozy didn't at least spend the night at each of his stops. They are beginning to see that Sarkozy is not here to carry on the old backslapping ways."

DRC-Rwanda

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